

Plans for Banff-Norquay gondola still in play

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A skier enjoyed the sweet conditions with the townsite Banff in the background at Mount Norquay west of Calgary. AL CHAREST/POSTMEDIA

A gondola link between Banff and Mount Norquay remains high on the wish list of the company behind the proposed project.

Liricon Capital Ltd. confirmed Thursday that it plans in the near future to present a second proposal for government approval to build the ambitious aerial tramway.

The company's first submission was denied last December by Parks Canada, which said completion of such an eco-transit hub would have negatively affected public use of the Mount Norquay access road.

Since then, discussions between the two parties "of a smaller project" that still includes a gondola from the Banff train station to the base of Norquay have been "very constructive," Liricon Capital partner Jan Waterous said in an email to Postmedia.

The objectives remain the same in trying to combine rail, shuttle service and aerial transit to reduce traffic congestion in the national park.

Specifically, Liricon wants to enhance Norquay's "ecological integrity by removing Norquay guest traffic off the six-kilometre access road while enhancing the visitor experience."

Waterous said it's too soon to say much more about the draft concept, which has not yet been presented to Parks Canada.

David Dunbar, public relations and communications officer for Banff National Park, said a revised proposal from Liricon is expected. Strict development limits remain in place, he said.

"Liricon has expressed interest in submitting a new proposal to Parks Canada for decision. Prior to doing so, they have tabled conceptual information for discussion," he said in an emailed statement.

"To date, these discussions have focused on Parks Canada's processes, policies and considerations for large scale land use proposals."

Waterous and her husband and business partner, Adam, have pushed to create a "green transit hub" at the Banff train station.

Their focus is on passenger rail service from the Calgary Airport to Banff, building aerial transit from the train station to the high alpine at Norquay, and creating free intercept parking for Banff's annual visitors that reach upwards of five million.

They have a long-term lease with CP Rail for the train station and the 30 acres of land that surround it, and last summer Liricon built Banff's first intercept lot for 500 cars and 22 RVs.

Waterous reiterates the gondola is not about adding another tourist attraction to the Banff area, but rather to create an environmentally sound form of transportation that lowers traffic congestion and supports the ecological integrity of the national park.

She said Liricon has been working with the University of Calgary to measure what effect the fully implemented vision would have on the reduction of greenhouse gases in the park. The company plans to release those findings to the public soon.

The Waterous' vision is to create a "car-free Banff," an innovative, integrated transit system in which visitors take shuttles to points of interest around the park. It's a model developed in Utah's Zion National Park and in European mountain towns such as Zermatt, Switzerland.

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